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AUTHOR Kleiman, David C.
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ABSTRACT

The linear orientation toward the teaching of speech communication courses designed for prospective teachers is criticized in this study for its too simplistic speaker/message/receiver paradigm. In support of the position that a far broader and more complex pattern of communication must be embraced if any contemporary theorizing about communication is to explain any meaningful portion of the communication process, the author suggests a social system approach. Under this approach the classroom is viewed as dependent upon its external environment for its existence and function and as part of an organized system of activity. This system is termed social and includes many different persons in interaction who perform many different functions interdependently and whose actions are socially promulgated and enforced. Emphasis is placed upon teacher behavior and the faculty peer group as a determinant of teacher communication in the classroom. The author calls for the development of speech communication courses for prospective teachers which recognize the teacher as part of this social system. (LG)

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SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSES FOR THE PROSPECTIVE TEACHER: A SOCIAL SYSTEMS APPROACH

by

David C. Kleiman
University of Colorado

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SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSES FOR THE PROSPECTIVE TEACHER: A SOCIAL SYSTEMS APPROACH

Within the United States, along with schools of education, departments of speech-communication have assumed a variety of roles in the training of prospective teachers: "Some departments have provided screening procedures for testing speech proficiency. Others have attempted to provide laboratories or have designed speech-communication courses to meet particular needs of the classroom teacher."[1]

In 1968 selected speech-communication scholars re-affirmed the need for speech-communication courses designed for prospective teachers. Recommendation Number Nineteen of the New Orleans Conference on Research and Instructional Development stated:

> The conferees encourage academic units in our area to provide a course focusing on the instructional communication process for all prospective teachers.[2]

In addition, the conferees stated that

> the area of speech-communication is particularly well-suited to provide prospective teachers with insights into the nature of classroom communication and its relationship to learning and instruction.[3]

Traditionally, within the field of speech-communication, those courses designed for the prospective teacher have focused on what Brockriede refers to as a linear conception of the

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[1]Roy Gene Anderson, "A Study of the Basic Speech-Communication Course Designed Primarily for Classroom Teachers" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1970), p. 1.

[2]Robert Kibler and Larry Barker (eds.), Conceptual Frontiers in Speech-Communication (New York: Speech Association of America, 1969), p. 28.

[3]Ibid., p. 29.

speaker presenting the message to the audience.[4]

Underlying the linear orientation are the following assumptions:

First, there is only one source of messages present: the teacher. Brown refers to the "single" source role of the teacher as "the teacher is a speech model approach" in which the assumptions are that "(1) children can learn by imitation of a worthy model; (2) the teacher's speech should provide the model; (3) the model is developed through guided practice of prescribed verbal and nonverbal behaviors."[5]

Second, the speaker (teacher) is given a set of rules for constructing the message. He is advised to "(1) teach one principle at a time; (2) teach principles and practice progressively; (3) base practice on theory; and (4) provide an encouraging atmosphere."[6] Once the prospective teacher has examined

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[4]Wayne Brockriede, "Trends in the Study of Rhetoric: Toward a Blending of Criticism and Science," in Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black (eds.), The Prospect of Rhetoric (New York: Prentice Hall, 1971), p. 127. The following sources serve to underscore the linear orientation of the speech-communication courses for prospective teachers: Herold Lillywhite, "Speech Needs of Teachers," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXII (December, 1946), 496-501; Grover A. Fuchs, "Speech in Teacher Training at Texas," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XL (October, 1954), 293-298; Julia C. Piquette, "Needed: Adequate Speech Training for Elementary Education Majors," Speech Teacher, IX (November, 1960), 276; and Roy Gene Anderson, Ibid.

[5]Kenneth L. Brown, "Implications of Communication Theory for Speech Communication in the Elementary School: A Response," in Proceedings of the Speech Communication Association Summer Conference VI, ed. Malcolm O. Sillars (New York: Speech Association of America, 1970), pp. 138-146.

[6]Oran Teague, "Course Planning," in Speech Methods and Resources, ed. Waldo W. Broden (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

his message carefully to determine whether he has followed the rules and chosen the correct words, the assumption is that he need only communicate the message to the audience (students) in order to be successful.

Third, the audience is conceived of as relatively homogeneous, and the school children become the "conditioned recipients of the 'teaching is telling syndrome' in which 'Good' child behavior is quiescence."[7] The student is seen as the target of teacher communication and not part of a communication process in which teacher and student act as both source and receiver.

Brockriede argues that "unfortunately, most of our current thinking and research stem from a linear conception of the speaker presenting the message to the audience."[8]

Within the field of speech-communication, the linear orientation has recently come under criticism. In addition to Brockriede's criticism, Professor Sam Becker calls our attention to the need of refocusing our efforts from a simple speaker/message paradigm. Becker argues that "any contemporary theorizing about communication, if it is to explain any meaningful portion of the processes of communication, must embrace a far broader and more complex pattern of communication than the simple speaker/writer, message, receiver paradigm."[9]

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[7]Brown, p. 139.

[8]Brockriede, p. 127.

[9]Samuel Becker, "Toward an Appropriate Theory for Contemporary Speech-Communication," in What Rhetoric (Communication Theory) Is Appropriate for Contemporary Speech Communication?, ed. David H. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1969), p. 14.

Becker's paradigm would include the following:

> (1) Individuals perceive message-events configurally. We each exist in a mosaic from which we must grasp and organize bits in order to arrive at a coherent picture of the world.
>
> (2) We must define messages in a way that is more descriptive of what man is exposed to rather than what man as a source creates.
>
> (3) Rhetorical theory must consider factors that shape messages and we need to consider reasons for the shaping.[10]

Becker further argues that:

> various message sets are, in effect, overlayed to form the large and complex communication environment or "mosaic" in which each of us exists. This mosaic consists of an immense number of fragments or bits of information of an immense number of topics. . . . Each individual must grasp from this mosaic those bits which serve his needs, must grasp them into message sets which are relevant for him at any given time and within each message set must organize the bits and close the gaps between them in order to arrive at a coherent picture of the world to which he can respond.[11]

With respect to speech-communication courses designed for prospective teachers, we must focus our attention on the teacher as an individual who exists in an environment from which he must grasp and organize information.

Becker's paradigm would suggest that we define the teacher's messages in the classroom in a way that is more descriptive of "what man is exposed to" and "consider the factors that shape messages"; consequently, I am arguing that a useful way of viewing teacher communication in the classroom is to recognize that such

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[10]Samuel Becker, "Rhetorical Studies for the Contemporary World," in The Prospect of Rhetoric, pp. 26-28.

[11]Brockriede, p. 127.

a social act is affected (in part) by his exposure to message sets outside of the classroom--that he is bombarded with messages as he comes in contact with the environment--the social systems of the school.

I am arguing that: (1) the classroom does not exist in a vacuum. Its existence and function depend in part on its external environment; (2) the classroom is seen as part of an organized system of activity; (3) the system includes many different persons in interaction who perform many different functions; and (4) the term social system is used because the participants are interdependent and because their actions are socially promulgated and enforced.[12]

Professor Richard Wisniewski, Assistant Dean of the College of Education at Wayne State University, argues that teacher training "should stress various insights into the workings of the (school) system."[13]

Professor Warner Blumberg argues for a social system orientation in our teacher training program as well. He maintains that "we emphasize curriculum and materials. . . . we focus on classroom technique instead of the whole organization and culture of the school."[14]

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[12]Fred H. Katz, "The School as a Complex Social Organization," in Sociology of Education, ed. Ronald M. Pavalko (Itasca: F. E. Peacock, 1965), p. 422.

[13]Richard Wisniewski, Teachers in Urban Schools (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 228.

[14]Ibid., p. 230.

Professor Seymour Sarason focuses on the importance of considering the social system of the school and argues that "few students of organizations have turned their attention to schools, and few students of schools have been sensitive to their organizational attributes."[15]

Similarly, McIntyre maintains that too frequently there is a tendency "to underestimate the complexity of the school system as a social system, and how this adversely affects what one hopes to accomplish."[16] McIntyre maintains that

> there can be many variations in organizational structure, and these variations are important in terms of the pattern of human functioning. Likewise, similar organizational structures can be inhabited by different kinds of people, and this, too, is important. The interaction between the structure and individuals must be our focus.[17]

Louis Smith studied teacher behavior in the classroom and he maintains that the decisions and teaching behaviors of teachers he studied were influenced "both as constraints and as opportunities, by a number of organizational variables. We did not find total isolation and autonomy in the self-contained classroom."[18] Smith argues that "a theory of teaching . . . needs a way of incorporating the broader organizational rules, directives, and activities."[19]

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[15]Wisniewski, p. 228.

[16]D. McIntyre, quoted in D. Sarason, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971), p. 231.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Louis Smith and William Geoffrey, The Complexities of an Urban Classroom (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1968), p. 242.

[19]Ibid.

In considering the social system of the school, the faculty member's peer group(s) can be considered as a factor which can influence member's behavior in the classroom.

The classic studies in organizational communication (the studies carried out by Mayo, Koethlisberger, and Dickson in the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago) suggest that formal organizations tend to breed informal organizations within them, and that "in the informal organization workers . . . are likely to establish relationships with each other which will influence the manner in which they carry out their jobs or fulfill their roles."[20]

Smith and Geoffrey, in their study, Toward a Model of Teacher Decision-Making in an Urban Classroom, call attention to the social systems and to the importance of the faculty peer groups as elements to consider in the classroom teacher's behavior.[21]

In a more recent study of classroom communication, Smith and Geoffrey found "staff cliques to be of major importance as the teachers decided on major courses of action."[22] The authors argue that "lesson plans do not have categories of 'integration into staff norms' as part of their outline,"[23] nevertheless,

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[20]Edgar Schein, Organizational Psychology (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 27.

[21]L. M. Smith and W. Geoffrey, Toward a Model of Teacher Decision-Making in an Urban Classroom (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Office of Education, Co-op. Res. Report No. J-048, 1965).

[22]Smith and Geoffrey, The Complexities of an Urban Classroom, p. 242.

[23]Ibid.

"'The ways things are done around here' is an important dimension of the teacher's life."[24]

David Berlo, in The Process of Communication, calls attention to the relationship between the social system and communication. He maintains that "once a social system has developed, it determines the communication of its members. Social systems affect how, why, to and from whom, and with what effects communication occurs."[25]

I see a faculty member's peer group(s) as one factor in the social system which can potentially influence the "hows" and "whys" of teacher communication in the classroom.

I have pointed to the social system and particularly to the faculty peer group as determinants of teacher communication in the classroom. As we come to grips with clarifying the mechanisms involved in the process I have sketched, I hope we will develop speech communication courses for prospective teachers that recognize the teacher as part of a social system with which he has to contend and which accounts--in part--for the communicative repertoire of the teacher in the classroom.

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[24]Smith and Geoffrey, The Complexities of an Urban Classroom, p. 242.

[25]David Berlo, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), p. 148.